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Inclusive cities for intercultural communities. European experiences

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Abstract

Multiculturalism is an emerging issue in research and in the political agenda, especially with regard to the recent migratory waves in Europe. The pivotal role of urban policies in intercultural integration has been increasingly recognized and today cities represent the forefront for improving cultural diversity and social cohesion.

Against this background, the paper explores what some cities are doing to be more inclusive, and points out the main challenges that communities are facing in order to provide for equitable outcomes in terms of social and spatial justice. Many initiatives and projects demonstrate the role of bottom-up initiatives and of community engagement. These are often activated by local policies that encourage the work of cross-cutting networks and embody clear visions of land development in an intercultural approach. The local scale represents both a privileged point of view to measure the level of inclusion in contemporary cities and a field for testing multicultural urban project.

In this perspective, urban planners can contribute to the identification of the needs of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural groups, thus transforming urban spaces and services for an intercultural local development also through community engagement and participation in regeneration processes.

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1. Immigration and cultural diversity in contemporary cities

The paper aims to analyze experiences developed in European cities for the improvement of intercultural integration. This focus is part of the multidisciplinary research “Città interetnica e cittadinanza inclusiva: il caso della Campania” coordinated by Bianca Petrella at the Second University of Naples (Italy), within the funding scheme L.R. 5/2002, 2008 of the Campania region.

Intercultural integration is a key issue both in political and in scientific debates because of urban societies. These are, for reasons linked to the international flows of people and cultures, increasingly multicultural (Sassen, 1991; Sandercock, 1998; Sen, 1999; Martiniello, 2000; Germain, 2002; Allam et al., 2004; Balbo, 2005; Grandi & Tanzi, 2007; Hutchinson & Krasem, 2007; Clemente & Esposito, 2008; Martinello & Rath, 2011; Lo Piccolo, 2013; Clemente & Oppido, 2015).

Producing an inclusive city is a shared goal in the international political and research agenda. This is defined as «[...] a place where everyone, regardless of wealth, gender, age, race or religion, is enabled to participate productively and positively in the opportunities cities have to offer» (UN-HABITAT, 2002:5). In this scenario, international migration is the most important factor affecting city populations (Oc, Tiesdell & Moynihan, 1997; Castel, 2000; Wood & Landry, 2007). Gebhardt, 2014).

Recent approaches focus on the role of a bi-directional and symmetrical dialogue as well as mutual learning between host and immigrant communities (Marconi & Ostanel 2015). This is also consistent with the concept of intercultural dialogue as an «[...] open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect», defined by *The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, adopted by the Foreign Ministers of the 47 member states in 2008.

Today multiculturalism represents the fourth dimension for a sustainable development: in the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, UNESCO points that «[...] As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature » (Declaration, article 1) and that «it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence» (Declaration, article 3).

In this perspective, the intercultural city is an equitable city (Madanipour, 2011; Michelangeli, 2015) that ensures equal access to services and housing to all citizens. Above all, it is a city where all inhabitants have the same opportunities and all ethnic minorities can participate in the decision-making process. Urban equity was also the central theme of the World Urban Forum (WUF), held in Medellin (Colombia) in April 2014.

Many projects and initiatives in Europe deal with integration challenges in urban contexts. These aim at identifying conditions that facilitate the interaction among individuals and groups who have different cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, such as EUROCITIES Integrating Cities Processes and Intercultural Cities Programme of the Council of Europe. Intercultural Cities Programme supports cities in reviewing their policies through an intercultural lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies for managing diversity and producing advantage from cultural diversity: «Interculturalism is a concept that promotes policies and practices that encourage interaction, understanding and respect between different cultures and ethnic groups» (Wood, 2009:11). The Programme proposes a set of analytical and practical tools for helping local stakeholders throughout the various stages of the process (Wood, 2009; Consiglio d'Europa, 2009). These initiatives stem from the principle that increasing cultural and ethnic diversity is not only a challenge but also a huge opportunity that cities must grasp.

Starting from this scenario, the research focuses on urban initiatives for multicultural integration that seek to create socially inclusive urban environments and thus to respond to the needs, challenges, and opportunities posed by new residents (Grandi, 2008; Wood, 2012; Ambrosini 2013; Fabbicatti, 2013; Briata, 2014). Therefore, the survey identifies initiatives with a specific focus on the urban organization of in terms of uses and services.

The study aims to offer useful insights to policy makers, city managers and planners for managing diversity and creating conditions for improving urban inclusiveness. Besides, the analysis of European case studies provides valuable insights to the discussion of more general concepts related to integration issues. These issues are particularly relevant if considering recent increase in migration flows. Indeed, recently, the wide refugee emergencies are creating a more challenging atmosphere, even in countries that were traditionally engaged in

integration policies for immigrants. The current economic crisis exacerbating social problems, and contributes to the creation of conflicts among groups of different cultures and nationalities.

2. Intercultural dialogue in European urban initiatives

2.1. Research methodology

The research aims at investigating how cities and citizens are facing migration in Europe by pointing out the role of spatial, social and economic organization for building inclusive cities. In particular, the study focuses on the role played by urban spaces and services to improve integration and multicultural coexistence, analysing policies and practices for enhancing diversity.

The research activities have been developed as follows:

- definition of analytical criteria, shared with the multidisciplinary research group, through selected keywords;
- screening of research centres addressing issues related to multiculturalism and immigration;
- definition of a “Case Study Review Form” and of a “Literature Review Form” for additional information about cases;
- selection of case studies and analysis through the survey form;
- analysis of evidence from the case studies;

Starting from a preliminary screening (Cities of migrations website; Intercultural cities Programme; European Website on Integration; UNESCO website), the selection of the cases focuses on the main issues in terms of urban planning. Consultation of indirect sources includes literature on the socio-economic data, literature and documents about the initiative, dissemination documents and products.

The survey form includes three sections: the first provides general information; the second includes a short analysis of the context; the third a description of the case. This structure aims at highlighting the characteristics of the case studies and to compare them through:

- keywords (referred to context, focus, and tools);
- period and scale of intervention (national, regional, and local);
- promoters, key-actors, stakeholders, and users;
- urban and social context;
- findings, dissemination tools, awards, use of participation processes.

Finally, the analysis of the initiative provides some indications for using these methods and tools in other contexts.

2.2. Topics emerging from the case studies

The case study collection includes the analysis of several initiatives, selected from Italy and from other European countries, in urban areas with high concentration of migrants, both in peripheral neighborhoods and in historical parts of the cities, starting from the 90s. The selection aims at highlight the relationship between the new social structure of the contemporary cities and the need to redesign spaces, functions, and services to make them adequate for a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. On the one hand, the analysis of completed initiatives allows us to evaluate their outcomes in both qualitative and quantitative terms. On the other hand, the most recent experiences outline some new trends and issues in the field.

The study includes governance, planning, and design experiences. In the survey, governance refers to decisional processes and institutional innovations; urban planning refers to methods and tools of planning; community planning includes community engagement and participation; while design refers to physical transformations.

At a high scale of analysis, the survey has focused on community planning and on regeneration processes aiming at improving multicultural cohabitation. In this perspective, initiatives such as the “Barcelona Interculturality Plan” and the “Tower Hamlets Community Plan” have a strategic role, representing the framework of principles that can be used to manage diversity while defining a long-term strategy.

Some initiatives are based on collaborative approaches and on community engagement tools. These seek to facilitate the dialogue among different cultural groups living in the same place, and to strengthen the sense of belonging, e.g. the “Pact for Convivial Living in the Station Zone” in the Italian city of Reggio Emilia (Bloomfield, 2013).

The analysis of several initiatives demonstrates that housing is often pivotal. Housing is a relevant indicator for measuring integration, since it represents a priority for all citizens. In self-building projects, local and migrant families with low incomes collaborate with building companies to realize their homes, with the support of technical experts and of cultural mediators. These experiences represent a solution both in terms of housing and of inter-ethnic socialization.

Table 1. Issues and tools

	Governance	Urban Planning	Community Planning	Design
Welcome services	☺ ☹			☺ ☹
Housing	☺ ☹			☺ ☹
Public spaces	☺ ☹	☺ ☹	☺ ☹	☺ ☹
Education and professional training	☺ ☹	☺ ☹		☺ ☹
Job creation			☺ ☹	☺ ☹
Services	☺ ☹	☺ ☹	☺ ☹	
Arts			☺ ☹	
Tourism services	☺ ☹			

Housing is also the focus of social mediation services. In particular, some initiatives are based on services to support migrants to find flats to rent, thus contrasting discrimination and prejudices. In this perspective, many cities are experimenting services and tools of social mediation for managing and solving interethnic conflicts.

As it emerges from the survey, public spaces are strategic “places” to fight spatial segregation and improve social inclusion of migrants in urban settings (UNESCO website). Some initiatives concern urban regeneration programs with a focus on multi-ethnic issues, recognizing the immigrant communities as a strategic element for local economic development (e.g. “The Gate - Living not leaving” and the “Urban - Barriera di Milano”, both in Turin).

Cultural and artistic initiatives bring together individuals/groups from minority/migrant communities together with the majority population to favor dialogue in divided societies, to contrast spatial and social segregation, e.g. “Draw Down the Walls” and “Shared future” in Belfast (Bollens, 2011; Esposito De Vita, 2014).

Initiatives for empowerment, professional qualification, and job creation contribute to contrast the professional segregation of immigrants and ethnic minorities. In some case studies, the project started from the reuse of old building in urban area, which were recovered for new activities related to immigrant inclusion (e.g. “Magdas Hotel” in Vienna, “Alma Mater Center” in Turin).

Besides, in some European cities, citizens of migrant origin are actively involved in touristic activities, accompanying citizens and tourists in urban tours, describing the places where they live, and promoting a form of responsible tourism. The objective of initiatives such as “Migrantour, intercultural urban routes”, co-founded by the European Union, is to support the integration of migrants by fostering mutual understanding and respect between all residents (Vietti, 2015) and thus strengthening the sense of belonging in new citizens.

Intercultural consultation and the engagement of residents in solving urban problems is a focus in ethnically mixed district, e.g. “Keten in de buurt” (Containers in the neighbourhood) in the city of Oss in the Netherlands, as well as collaborative approach to neighborhood planning, for contrasting segregation, e.g. in the initiatives of “Sense of place” in Soho Road and Dudley Road in Birmingham.

The survey includes cases of awareness-raising campaigns to contrast discrimination, racism and prejudice and to support and promote integration processes, within a wide planning strategy, e.g. the “OXLO - Oslo Extra large” campaign in Norway.

Websites, social networks and other multimedia applications are widely used as tools for information, community participation and dissemination processes. Additionally, these are useful for transferring best practices in other cities.



Fig. 1. “Love Difference”, permanent light installation by M. Pistoletto on the façade of Porta Palazzo, a multiethnic market area in Turin (Italy). Photo by G. Daldanise

3. From diversity to equity. Evidence from the case studies

The main research goal is to review a wide range of local initiatives in order to point out factors that can support multicultural integration processes for more inclusive cities. The findings show that many cities are facing challenges in addressing adequately the needs of migrants, and thus reflect urban diversity and building equity in urban context.

The evidence from the selected cases allows us to highlight some strengths that can enhance a comprehensive approach to managing diversity:

- The support of a wide territorial network, the simultaneous involvement of institutions, stakeholders, associations, NGO, and local communities, and the strategic role of a key actors;
- The use of collaborative and participatory methods and tools to activate bottom-up processes and intercultural consultation and engagement, in order to identify problems and solutions together with all residents;
- The importance of a strengthened sense of belonging in all groups living in a place, involving them and encouraging interaction with the other groups;
- The relevance of mediation services for migrants, also provided by other migrants;
- The advantage of dissemination through multimedia tools and social networks, also in order to involve younger generations.

Finally, the survey shows that the inclusive city focuses on building social cohesion by encouraging interaction among cultural groups. In this perspective, the local scale represents both a vantage point to measure the level of inclusion and a field for testing experiences of multicultural urban project.

All the case studies analyzed should offer suggestions for a comprehensive approach and sets of tools for policy makers, city managers, and planners who aim to plan for diversity in a multicultural community.

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